

Richard Giles' Questions
(on Breathing)

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Referring to a tape of Oct. 6, on 'Breathing' by Khun Sujin.

1. Through which doorway is breathing experienced?

Before answering this question we should distinguish about mindfulness of breathing in samatha and in vipassanā.

In samatha breath as object of awareness is not a characteristic of reality which is experienced as it is, as no self. The concept of breath which is the object of samatha is learned through touching (Vis. III, 119). Sati of samatha is aware of breath where it touches the nosetip or upper lip. Then, when one has become very skilful, the sign, the mental image appears, through the mind-door. Breath is very subtle, as Khun Sujin explains on the tape, it is not common to all. And also the 'Visuddhimagga' states that it is one of the most difficult subjects of samatha, the field of Buddhas and Pacceka Buddhas.

There is sati in samatha, and it 'remembers' to be aware of breath when it touches. Sati in samatha is not the same as sati in vipassanā. Sati in samatha is not aware of characteristics of nāma and rūpa which appear.

When one has great accumulations for breath as object of samatha jhāna can be attained. This is carefully explained in the 'Visuddhimagga'. The person who can attain jhāna can be mindful of any reality after the jhānacitta has fallen away. It can be rūpa, it can be citta or cetasika. He does not select. He does not select the jhānacitta which comes quite naturally to him. He does not desire for jhāna, it arises because he has cultivated conditions for it.

It is the selection of a special object which is such a hindrance to know reality as reality, as a conditioned element.

What we call breath are actually rūpas such as hardness, softness, heat or cold, pressure or motion which can be directly experienced through the bodysense. We do not have to think of breath. When we think: breath, breath, the rūpas do not appear, we are thinking of a concept.

2. If breath is the label for the experience of hardness and temperature at a certain place and since they are among the 18 types of rūpa that are conditioned by kamma, how is it that breath is only conditioned by citta?

Let us first talk about conditions for different rūpas.

Rūpas arise in groups, units of at least 8 rūpas (inseparable rūpas). Some units are 9, 10, and even more. What we call our body is made up of different groups of rūpa, and these different groups are conditioned by kamma, citta, food and temperature. The group of rūpas we call breath are conditioned by citta.

When people think that they notice breath are they sure it is rūpa conditioned by citta? It may not be breath, but just what we call oxygen. →

← Breath is very subtle. People may take for breath what is not breath conditioned by citta.

You imply in your question that hardness and temperature ^(always) are conditioned by kamma. No, that is not so. These can also be conditioned by citta, temperature or food. All over the body some rūpas are conditioned by kamma, some by citta, some by temperature, some by food.

So long as there is citta there is life and citta conditions breath.

3. Can breath be the object of awareness any time since there is always breath and citta whether we are awake or asleep?

The rūpas which we call breath can be object of awareness in vipassanā WHEN THEY APPEAR, not because we wish them to appear. Someone who has great accumulations for breath in samatha and he has been aware in samatha of breath, knows when it is breath, knows when a rūpa conditioned by citta (and not oxygen) appears. But ^{also} breath can be object of awareness in vipassanā. →

← Thus, when breath is the object ^{of vipassanā,} for example hardness can be experienced as it is: only hardness, a conditioned element.

Why does one want to be aware of breath? There are so many nāmas and rūpas all the time, why select breath? It can so easily be an object of clinging instead of an object of awareness.

4. If the answer to question 3 is that we cannot be aware when asleep, why not? Because it seems there must be always breath and citta.

There is always breath and citta, but not always citta which is mindful of nāma or rūpa. As you know the citta which is mindful arises only during the javana moments and it is kusala citta. When you are in deep sleep and not dreaming there is bhavanga-citta (life-continuum) which is not kusala citta, but vipākacitta, and this type does not arise within a process of citta.

When we are dreaming, is there not mostly akusala citta?

During the day there is more often akusala citta than sati,